



HOME OXYGEN SAFETY

The number of patients using home oxygen to treat pulmonary diseases is on the rise. When an occupant of a residence is using oxygen an “OXYGEN IN USE” sign should be visible on the front door.

It is critical for those using oxygen to know and understand the associated fire risks. Normal air contains about 20% oxygen; home oxygen therapy contains nearly 100% oxygen. While oxygen itself does not burn, it helps things burn hotter and faster. It is important to keep the oxygen system away from all heat sources in the home including gas stoves, matches, candles, fireplaces appliances, electric razors, hair dryers and other heat sources. Patients with home oxygen should avoid using flammable products such as oils, grease, petroleum products and oil based lip balms or lotions.

Oxygen in the home has an elevated risk for patients who continue to smoke. There have been a number of reported cases of life threatening burns, even deaths because patients continued to smoke while using home oxygen. Though some patients may think they can just turn off the flow of oxygen, oxygen builds up in the home, on hair, clothing and the body of patients using it. The match and cigarette become the heat source and ignite the oxygen.

No one should smoke in a home where a patient is on oxygen therapy. This includes family members, friends, health care persons or home repair people.

The risk of fire is not just a danger to the patient, but also to family members in the home, neighbors in adjacent apartments and buildings. These fires also endanger the lives of the emergency responders called to the scene. Home oxygen fires pose a threat to firefighters as their gear catch fires at a lower temperature when there is more oxygen in the room.

Home oxygen fires are a public health concern. There is no safe way to smoke when using home oxygen. Any and all injuries from oxygen fires are preventable. Doctors and family members should urge and assist patients to quit smoking while oxygen is in their home. This is the best way to protect themselves, their families, their neighbors and emergency responder.

Office of the State Fire Marshal: www.mass.gov/dfs